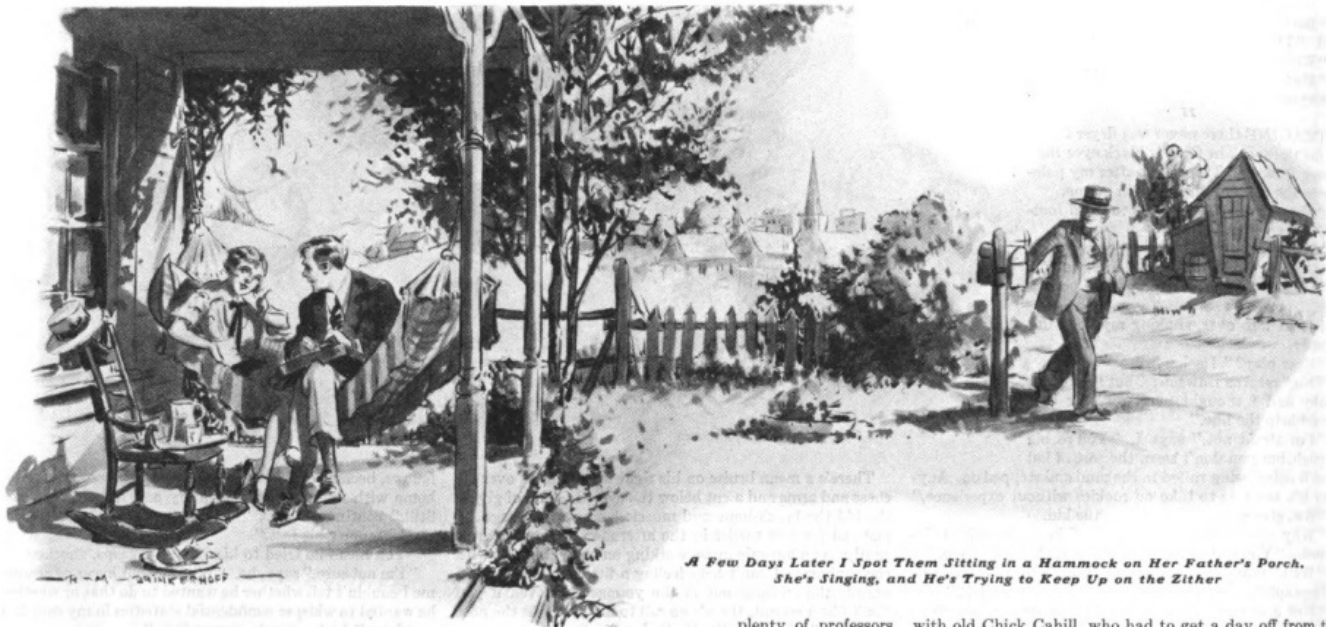


# THE MAD SPOT By RICHARD CONNELL

ILLUSTRATED BY R. M. BRINKERHOFF



A Few Days Later I Spot Them Sitting in a Hammock on Her Father's Porch. She's Singing, and He's Trying to Keep Up on the Zither

AS THE curtain rises we discover Mr. Silent Tim Cooney seated at his ease in the quiet cool of the back room of the Old Oaken Bucket, thoughtfully drinking an amber, frothy beverage from a large glass with a handle on it. Mr. Cooney is a portly gentleman in his fifties, with a nose like a king's ruby, gnarled ears like pretzels, and wise, benevolent eyes. As he raises his glass to his lips, which he does often and with a practiced gesture, a diamond, no smaller than a lump of sugar, may be seen twinkling on his finger. He is quietly dressed in a checked suit, a cerise tie, in which glitters yet another diamond, and a shirt, predominantly heliotrope, which a near-sighted man would have little difficulty seeing in the dark. A pint-sized, sleepy waiter named Psst dozes in a corner, his hands folded across a dirty dickey, and at intervals comes out of his coma long enough to replenish the glasses of Mr. Cooney and his guest, a nondescript youngish man, who is listening to Mr. Cooney as he rumbles and bumbles along endlessly. Mr. Cooney's sobriquet, "Silent," one surmises carries with it a perfume of irony. It seems probable that it was given him by some sporting editor in the same spirit one calls a two-hundred-and-forty-pound human pachyderm "Babe" or "Tiny." Mr. Cooney appears to be reminiscing—

Funny business I'm in. Ivory hunting, they call it. Well, that fits. Mostly it is ivory I dig up—solid ivory—and if you could make pugs into piano keys I'd be eating chopped diamonds for breakfast food. My tough luck is that ivory in the prize ring is worth about a dime a ton. But you wait. One of these days I'll find my oil gusher. I've been looking for him high and low, and looking just as hard as those forty-niners hunted pay dirt. They had a cinch, compared to me. They had a rough idea just about where the gold was, but my gold mine might be anywhere. I might snake my brawny lad off the front of a truck out there in Ninth Avenue; I might find him twisting trees out by the roots up Seattle way; he may be a giant Chink poling a junk along the Yellow River, or a tough larrikin juggling crates on the water front at Melbourne. Time and again I've thought I had him; but a real champ heavy is like anything else strictly first-class—just about as rare as buffalo tracks in the Subway.

I'm a big-business man, I am. Box fighting is a real industry these days—when a couple of chesty ex-paper-hangers can draw a million-dollar gate for playing puss in the corner with each other for ten rounds. Some people claim that's all wrong. I dunno. I'm too busy living to be a philosopher. You hear deep blokes say it's all damp to pay Young Kid Battling Nitwit a hundred grand for waltzing ten rounds, when there are a lot of much brainier guys teaching botany or whatever it is in the colleges at five thousand the year. Mebbe, mebbe. Still, there are

heavy who can give it and take it, and who stands out from the crowd. Believe me, son, the world is crazy for class, and will pay for it, and the ordinary fighter, who is too lazy or thick to learn his job and learn it right, won't make any more of a success with the mitts than the same sort of commonplace umbay will make in another business, whether it's teaching Deuteronomy or selling weenies.

Another thing, son. There's a lot of comic laws on the books these days, but as yet they haven't slipped over one saying that a man has to fork up twenty-five cherries to watch a couple of lumberjacks belting each other. Mebbe the day will come when you can pack a stadium with sixty thousand people to listen to a couple of learned lads debating which came first, the hen or the egg, but until then Mr. Timothy Malachi Cooney is going to stay with his mission in life, which is to discover a big, broad ape with a steel chin and a sweet sock, who can lambaste his way to the heavyweight title and draw a hundred bucks every time he sneezes. Of which, by the way, your friend Mr. Cooney will get fifty.

Well, why will I get important jack if I can find a world beater? Because it's hard—that's why. Don't I know. Look at the case of Oweny Padden—the greatest fighter that ever answered a bell. Yes, I mean it. I've seen 'em all, and managed a few. I saw big Jeff tag Jim Corbett on the chin at Coney Island—Lord, how time flies!—and I saw the Toledo massacre—and I was in Fitz's corner the night he sank the ship on Tom Sharkey's chest—but good as they all were, this Oweny Padden could have licked the lot of them with one hand while he ate scrambled eggs with the other. And you never even heard of him? Well, that's his fault, not mine. It's a sad story—or maybe it's funny. I dunno. Anyway—

Go back a bit. Remember all that vododeo about white hopes? Remember how all the managers were scurrying around, combing the bushes, looking under stones, peering down manholes hoping to find a genuine alabaster beauty who could push over the big smoke—all for the honor and glory of the white race, and a million iron men. They yanked fat boys out of the cabs of locomotives and hauled overgrown bakers away from their ovens and tried to make fighters of 'em. What a fine lot of mouse food they turned out to be!

Me, I was to blame for some of the most awful round-heeled palookas. There was the Armenian Atrocity. I came across him hauling a steam roller out of a ditch near Camden. Strong? Say, he could have used railroad rails for neckties; and he had a face that made you wish you were blind. All chin, and a ferocious fighting scowl. I thought I had a winner. Fight? Sure. In the gym he nearly hit his sparring partners upon the rafters, and if you hit him on the chin with a sledge hammer you'd only hurt your hand. Just to get him started I matched him

with old Chick Cahill, who had to get a day off from the Old Soldiers' Home to come to the fight. I hated to see an old-timer like Chick get slapped down, but business is business. Well, my turk comes out like a runaway windmill and misses a swing that would have bounced Chick's bald bean from here to Rome, Italy, if Chick hadn't ducked under it. Chick gives my porpoise a short poke just above the belt, and honest, it wasn't hard enough to dent a cup custard. My man mountain lets out an "O-o-o-osh," like a balloon tire that's picked up a nail, and sits down.

"Get up, you banana!" I yells at him. "Get up and fight, you swab!" He gives me a hurt look.

"Not me!" he bawls. "I'm a jaw fighter, I am. He can hit me on the chin all he likes, but when he hits me in the stummick, I draw the line." And he stayed where he was, and the next day I crated him and shipped him back to his steam roller.

Then there was that squarehead I snared off a schooner. He had shoulders and chest enough for four men, and you could have put his brains into a fountain pen. He never forgot anything I taught him, because he never learned it. But tough! Boy, if you dropped an anvil on Ole's neck he'd say, "What? Mosquitoes here?" He was as clumsy as a moose on skates, but I figured nothing short of a dum-dum bullet would stop him. Well, I matched him with Chick Cahill, the trial horse in those days, and for six rounds Chick bobbed away from Ole and hit him with everything but the gate receipts, making just about as much impression on my lad as you'd make throwing popcorn balls at the Statue of Liberty. In the seventh Chick was all in, and you could have pushed him over with a cross word. I barks at Ole to wade in and finish him. My Scandahoofian winds up, makes a wild-eyed swipe, gets all tangled up in his own legs, does a high dive to the canvas, bangs his own chin on the floor, and knocks himself as cold as a sea-lion's nostrils. I was plumb discouraged. Still faint heart never filled an inside straight, so I made up my mind to make one more prospecting trip.

A friend of mine had tipped me that there was a big cow chaser out Arizona way with a kayo punch hidden under his shirt, and I set out to give him the up and down. Just outside of Lomax, Nebraska, our engine sprained its wrist and I had half an hour to kill, so I took myself for a stroll to view the beauties of nature, if any. I was passing a field when I saw something I thought was a haystack, only haystacks don't have legs and wear dungarees. It looked too big to be a man, and too small to be a silo, and I was gazing at it, pensiveliike, when into the field skips a yearling bull, very playful, and the bull starts for the man—for a man it was—with head down and no good in its eyes.

Now call me a liar. It's been done. But if this isn't the truth, may I lose my thirst. That haystack in blue dungarees turned round, and I saw a grinning freckled face that looked no more flustered than if the bull had been a hop-toad. As the bull charged him young haystack gave it a

cuff alongside the ear, the way you'd brush a kitten aside, and believe it or not, friend bull was slapped sidewise like he was a paper doll.

Then my haystack, light on his feet as a toe dancer, sprints across the field, takes the five-foot fence at a bound, and stands there in the road near me. He was young, with hayseed in his red hair, and sort of simple-looking, with a schoolgirl complexion in between the freckles, and when I spoke to him he blushed and looked down at his Number Sixteen brogans and sort of wiggled as he stood there, just like little Mamie standing before teacher and her home work not done.

"Young fella," I says, "my name is Cooney—Timothy M.—well and favorably known from coast to coast as a square-shooting manager. Do you want to fight?"

He gives me a scared look. "Me fight?" he pipes. "But I ain't sore at you, Mr. Cooney."

"Listen," I says. "Managers don't fight. They manage. I mean do you want to fight some boy your own size, or thereabouts?"

"But I ain't sore at anybody," he says.

"Listen," I says. "I'm speaking of business, not pleasure. I'm asking you do you want to go into the fight business and make some money?"

He puzzles over it a minute; then he says, "Gee whillikers, could I get money for fighting?"

"Well, it's been done," I says. "I guess anybody who can slap a healthy bull dizzy can probably pick up quite a haul of change in the ring."

"A lot of money?" he says.

"Depends on how good you are," I says. "Anyhow you can make a blamed sight more fighting than you can putting onions to bed."

"Well," he says, slowly, "I don't crave to fight. I'm sort of quiet and peaceful. But I would like to have some money—I mean a lot of money —"

I'm beginning to think this big apple knocker is one of these natural-born financiers when he says, "You see, Mr. Cooney, I don't get het up easy, so fighting's no fun for me, but last week I sent off to Chicago for a zither, and I owe twenty-seven dollars and fifty cents on it, and I won't fight nobody for a cent less than that."

Well, I let my train go on its way and went up to the farm where my haystack was hired man, and he tucked his other shirt in a suitcase and we headed East for Billy Wald's health farm in Jersey, where Billy teaches green pugs the tricks he learned when he was middleweight champ years ago. My haystack turned out to be named Owen Padden, twenty-two, parents from Tipperary, two hundred and thirty-seven pounds, and no more fat on him than a razor blade. He slept in his underwear, didn't smoke or drink, had never seen an oyster or a skyscraper, and had one ambition—to learn to play Mighty Lak' a Rose on the zither. Just a big, soft-spoken, easy-going bick kid, but the best-looking piece of ivory I ever laid an eye on.

I turned him over to Billy Wald and said, "See what he's got," and buzzed over to the big town to tell the newspaper boys that I'd found the real white hope at last. They handed me a hand-painted snigger. They remembered the Armenian and the squarehead.

When I got back to Billy's place he was excited, which means something.

"Tim," he greeted me, "that baby is the real McCoy. He's as green as a park bench, but as bright as a new headlight, and if he ain't a natural-born fighter I'm the king of the Zulus. He's got a bump in either hand that would make the Washington Monument rattle, and he can take it, upstairs and down. I had him go a few rounds with Smoky Gould, who was born with boxing gloves on, and before it was over I thought Smoky was going to die the same way. And this Padden was only fooling too. Pulling his punches, and they were hard enough to hang an old warhorse like Smoky over the ropes. Tim, your boy is a natural, and with a little schooling he'll mow down anything he meets."

Next day I took a long peek at Oweny in the gym. Well, some guys haven't much, whether it's in boxing or flute playing, but by plugging away they get to be fair. Others have what you call talent, and if they stick at it they get good. Then, once in a hundred years, some guy comes along who has the stuff from the minute he first draws breath—some egg like Shakspeare or Napoleon—and he just naturally beats the world and you call him a genius. Well, Oweny Padden was a genius. He seemed to do the right thing by instinct. He wasn't up on the tricks, of course, but he picked 'em up fast. I watched him boxing Smoky Gould, a hefty dingie with plenty of experience. Soft gloves and headgears, of course, so nobody could get hurt, but at that he had Smoky grunting and covering up.

"Class," said Billy Wald. "It sticks out all over him. Look at him shoot that straight right-hand punch. That's something you couldn't teach to some bozos in a million years. Tim, you picked up a horseshoe this time."

"Mebbe," I says, not able to believe my luck, "there's a flaw somewhere. A lad may look like the subtreasury in the gym and turn out to be a peanut stand in the ring."

"There's only one thing," says Billy, "I don't like about him."

"What's that?" I asks.

"He's so blasted good-natured," says Billy. "A fighter ought to have a mean, murderous streak in him somewhere. To have the killer instinct. Look at that now! Smoky just stung your kid in the kisser. Now, just for an instant, a smack like that should have brought a fighting scowl to the kid's face, but it didn't. Oweny smiled like Smoky had done him a favor."

"He'll be different," I says, "when he's up there in front of a crowd fighting for zither money."

"Hope so," says Billy. "He sure is the best-natured guy I've struck for days. Last night at supper Bud Gowen was in a savage mood and was sort of hazing the kid—and you

know what a wicked tongue Bud has. Well, young Padden wasn't riled a bit. Didn't come back at Bud at all."

"A cool head is a good thing to have in the ring," I says.

"Yeah," says Billy, "but you've got to blaze up now and then and get fighting mad, or you'll never finish your man and please the crowd."

It wasn't so long before I decided Oweny Padden was ripe and ready to strut his stuff in a four-round-prelim go with Chick Cahill. I told Oweny to step round a bit, wait till Chick slowed up, and then trot out the kayo wallop. So Oweny fiddled away, poking Chick pretty, until in the third round Chick didn't know whether he was in the ring or on a straw ride. I give Oweny the nod, meaning "Finish him." What does my jewel do? He backs off and stalls, and Chick lives through the round. Before they come up for the fourth I poured some hot words into Oweny's ear.

"Listen, big boy," I says, "what do you think you're in there for—to knit little garments? You should have nailed him when you had him wabbling. What's the matter? Are you yellow?"

Very seriously he says, "No, Mr. Cooney, I ain't yellow."

Then the bell rings, and Oweny makes a few half-hearted dabs at Chick, with no juice behind 'em at all, and, even so, Chick is grogged up again and the crowd is yelling for a kayo.

Oweny could have knocked Chick over with a lady finger, but he just won't cut loose. He holds Chick up till the round is over and the referee, who must have gone to reform school with Chick in the high-wheel-bicycle days, calls it a draw.

I bawled Oweny out proper. "What's the notion, stupid?" I roared at him. "One hearty poke would have finished him—and what do you do? You start playing post office with him, that's what you do. What's the idea?"

Oweny sort of squirmed.

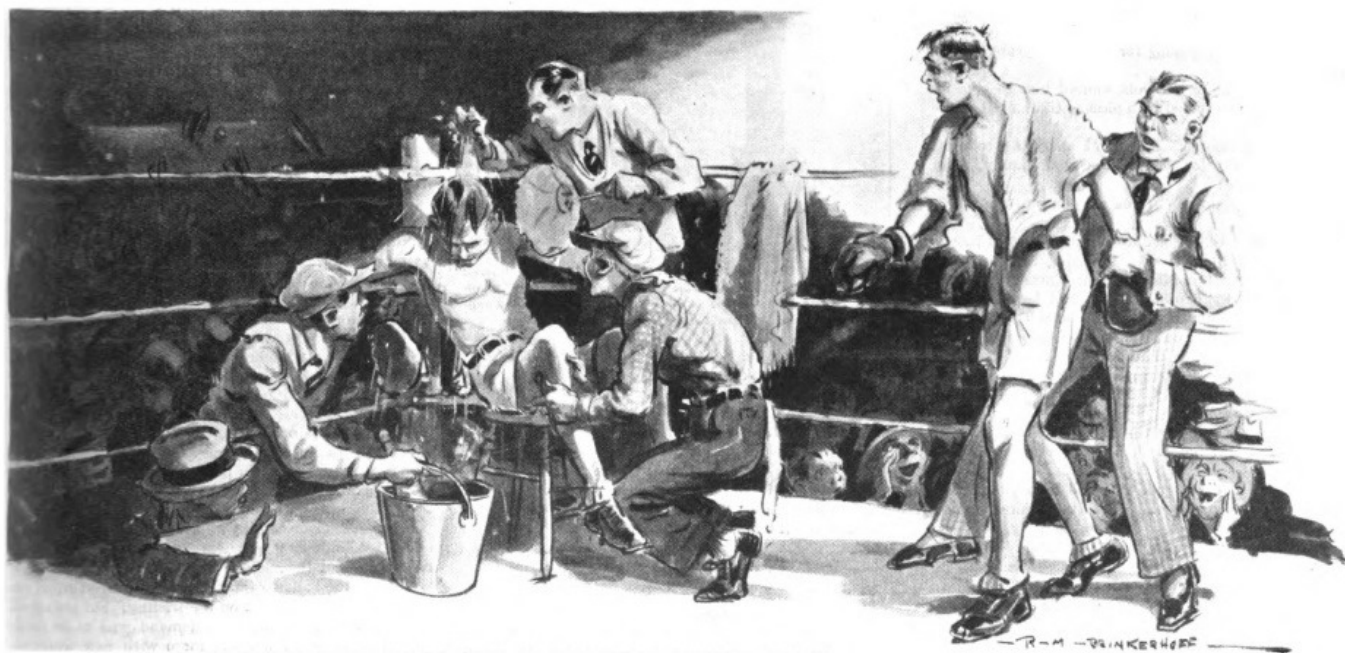
"Well, Mr. Cooney," he said, "you see I didn't want to hit him. The old boy reminded me of my father. I had him licked, so why murder him?"

"Say, Sandy Claws," I barked back, "do you think the public is going to pay good money to see you play pitty-pat baker's man? They want action and results. Next time you step into a ring check your soft heart outside. Chick would have flattened you if he'd had the chance."

"But he didn't," Oweny said, and that was all I could get out of him.

Our next start was against Chimp Spengler, billed as the Hairy Ape of the Appalachians, a rowdy party with a face that looked like it had fell from an airplane. My gem patted the Chimp plenty, and in the fourth had him num on his feet and ready for the cleaners. Then the same thing happened. Oweny slowed to a walk. He was fresh and strong, too, and could have finished off the Chimp with one whole-hearted slap on the wrist. But he didn't deliver it. He just waltzed with Spengler till the end of the bout.

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"Gee Whillikers," He Kept Saying. "Gee Whillikers, I'm Sorry. I Hope He Ain't Hurt Bad"



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gives her the maple-sugar eye, and the next thing I know he's saying, "So you live only nine miles from here. Well, well, now ain't that grand! You know, girlie, I got a new roadster that can get over there in nine minutes flat —"

Poor Oweny. He didn't know whether it was Christmas or raining. Him and his zither and his cow-belt manners didn't exactly shine against the Sheik and his roadster and his long practice in handing out the line of hokey girls like to hear. Vangie was a sensible girl—but she was a girl, and twenty.

Just before the fight I sprang it on Oweny.

"Oweny," I says, as I'm lacing on his gloves, "ain't it nice about the Sheik and Vangie? It looks like wedding bells."

Oweny blinks and looks wide-eyed and perplexed. "But she promised to marry me," he says. "I don't think Vangie would go back on her word."

"Boy," I says, "words don't mean nothing to women. Any woman figures she has a right to change her mind, if a man comes along she likes better than the first one."

It was rough stuff, but I had to do it.

Oweny gulps. Then, after a while, he says, "Well, I feel pretty bad. I certainly do care about Vangie, but I guess mebbe you're right. She knows what she wants, and the Sheik is a lot handsomer and smarter than I am."

I wanted to swoon. "Mebbe," I says, "he won't be so handsome when you finish with him."

Oweny says nothing. Just looks sad.

"Listen," I says. "If I was stuck on a girl, and a professional Romeo like that blew in and cut me out, I'd carve him up into shrimp salad."

"Well," says Oweny, "I dunno. I suppose if he's a better man than me when it comes to love-making, that's my hard luck."

They hop to it. Oweny makes the Sheik look like he was handcuffed. He plays with the lady-killer, tapping him around the body.

"Sock him on the nose!" I yell. "Shoot that right to his jaw! It's glass!"

They go eight rounds. Mostly tango with a Charleston here and there. Oweny simply will not bore in. At that, he wins by a mile.

Afterward I'm almost too weak to be sore. "Well," I says, "can you give me one good reason why you shouldn't be shot?"

He stares at me. "Me? Shot?" he says. "Have I done something?"

"No!" I scream. "Not a thing. Lemme see—did you go into that ring to teach that smirking tramp to play button, button, or was it squat tag? Oweny, why, in the name of heaven, didn't you knock him loose from his complexion?"

"Aw, Mr. Cooney," says Oweny, "I couldn't. You see I thought if he's really going to marry Vangie, I didn't want to mark him up none. I like her too much to ruin her husband."

That was almost the pay-off for me. I decided to ship Oweny back to his onions. Then Spike Gilhooley slips on a cork and sprains his Adam's apple, and Tex offers me a chance to substitute Oweny for Spike in a ten-round go with Jigger Kritz for serious dough. Kritz was good. Experienced and crafty he was, and the logical contender for the championship. Oweny wasn't ready for such a good man, but I thought I might as well toss the big good-natured chunk of Edam to the lions, so I signed on the dotted. It was to be a tune-up bout for Kritz, for he was due to meet the champion in the fall, and as the champ had been living high, fast and easy, it looked like Jigger was a sure shot for the title. Nobody liked Jigger much. He was an ornery cuss, with a vinegar look on his face always.

I says to Oweny before the fight, "Listen here, big boy. I'm giving you a grand chance. You're meeting Jigger in a no-decision bout in Jersey. Now he knows

too much for you to outpoint him. Your one chance is to sail in and sock him down. If you do that you'll be right in line for a match with the champ."

He doesn't seem to be listening to me. "Mr. Cooney," he says, "it's all right between me and Vangie. She didn't like the Sheik so much, after all. He's gone to the Coast and he never even said good-by. So Vangie and I are going to get married soon as I get a little more money."

"Oweny," I says, "if you belt over Jigger you'll make more dollars than there are cornucops in Nebraska. You'll be able to buy Vangie a baby-blue limousine for every day in the week."

"We'd only need one," says Oweny.

"Let me tell you about Jigger," I go on.

"He's a bad actor. He makes a regular practice of robbing poor boxes so he can use the money to buy kerosene to burn down orphan asylums with. That's the kind of a human hyena you're going to fight."

"Poor fellow," says Oweny. "He probably won't never go to heaven if he's as mean as that."

I went out and drank a gallon of varnish.

You didn't see the fight? Too bad. Anyhow, for eight rounds Jigger stepped round Oweny and shot him full of holes. Jigger was too smart for my boy. Oweny tried some, but he was floundering and missing and was pretty well cut up. Still he kept smiling.

Between the eighth and the ninth I said to Oweny, "For pity's sake, wake up and slug. Tear into him. He's got the fight won on points."

"I'd like to oblige you, Mr. Cooney," says Oweny, "but I'm thinking of retiring from the fight business after tonight, so why spoil his chances of winning the championship? They say he's got his heart set on it and has been working toward it for ten years. It don't mean nothing to me."

I couldn't think up an answer to that. The ninth was like the rest—Oweny boxing away and putting no heft or sting in his punches, and Jigger slipping or blocking them and clicking off points on my boy's chin and ribs.

I didn't say a thing between the ninth and tenth. What could I say? I'd said everything and tried everything, and Oweny just couldn't be steamed up to forget his sweet nature a minute and turn vicious.

Jigger knows he's got the fight in the bur-lap, so he begins to fool with Oweny and to kid him.

"Well, good-natured guy," says Jigger, "I guess all you got is a smile."

You see Jigger is sore because the fans pan him for being such a sour ball. He keeps it up.

"You can't fool me," says Jigger as they clinch. "You grin like that to get a drag with the fans. You want 'em to think you're good-natured, when really you ain't nothing of the sort."

"Huh?" says Oweny.

"Yeah," says Jigger, dancing around "I'm wise to you. That good-natured stuff you pull is the bunk. Underneath you ain't one bit good-natured —"

What else Jigger was going to say, I don't know. All I know is that just then he got a sock in the teeth that made him black bottom across the ring. I thought I was having a hop dream. There was my Oweny plunging after him, his teeth bared in a snarl, his eyes flashing and his fists lashing out like drunk pistons. The round has only a minute and a half to go. Oweny did about an hour's fighting in a few seconds. He smashed Jigger all over the ring, and finally dropped him with a terrific right hook. Jigger took a nine count and hauled himself up with cobwebs in his eyes. I heaved my breath. I expected Oweny to be back. Well, Oweny, snorting fire, leaped. Jigger, flailing away like a fury. Oweny missed six hay-makers but landed the seventh somewhere—it didn't matter. It was so hard it would have knocked out Jigger if it had hit his brother. As soon

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the ten seconds were droned off, Oweny picked Jigger up and carried him to his corner. Oweny's eyes were full of tears.

"Gee whillikers," he kept saying. "Gee whillikers, I'm sorry. I hope he ain't hurt bad."

Then he turns to me and says, "Honest, Mr. Cooney, I'm sorry I forgot myself, but he didn't have no right to say I wasn't good-natured."

I could have got Oweny a match with the champ. He wouldn't take it.

"No, sir, Mr. Cooney," he said. "I'm through. I guess you can't win fights unless you fly off the handle, the way I did

with Jigger, and it's a terrible feeling and I don't want to have it ever again. I'm ashamed of myself, but he shouldn't have said what he said. I'm marrying Vangie tomorrow, and we're going out to Nebraska. I got thirty-four thousand dollars in savings banks and I know a nice little farm that I can buy for sixteen."

There was no budging him. So there he is now.

They say he's got the most prosperous farm in the state and any number of kids. Can you bend it? A world's champion hoeing onions! Ain't life silly? . . . Pssst! Pssst! Two more—dark.

# KREOLITE

## "Outlast the Factory"

